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Notes on Edible Plants. I.

RANUNCULACEÆ.

The natural order *Ranunculaceæ* includes in general plants of an acrid, caustic or poisonous nature, sometimes insipid, but often dangerous, and reference to their uses as poisons or in medicine are frequent. It has long been remarked, however, that the irritant principle has in general so little stability as to be expelled by heat, boiling or drying, and it may not exist in organs yet immature, hence various plants of this order have found use as aliments, as well as portions of the plant in which the dangerous substance does not appear to reside.

Among the species to which alimentary qualities have been ascribed are *Clematis flammula*, whose young shoots when boiled are said to be eaten (Maout & Decaisne); *Ranunculus auricomus* and *R. lanuginosus*, the leaves boiled and eaten (Duchesne); *R. bulbosus*, L., whose boiled leaves are edible (Lightfoot); *R. edulis*, Boiss., whose small tubers together with the young stems, leaves and blossoms, are brought to market in North Persia (Unger); *R. ficaria*, L., the pilewort, whose young leaves are boiled as a food by the Swedish peasantry (Linnæus); *R. repens*, L., the mildest of the genus, and said to be eaten as a pot-herb (Martyn); and *R. sceleratus*, L., which serves the shepherds of Wallachia as an edible after boiling (Don.), although Lindley says that beggars use its acrid leaves to produce ulcers and sores in order to excite compassion. *Caltha palustris*, in the Eastern United States, is a popular spring green, and under the name of cowslips is largely collected from the marshes about the villages of Massachusetts. Various species of *Nigella* produce pungent seeds, used as a condiment and a spice, as *N. arvensis*, L. (Don). *N. damascena*, L., is cultivated for its seeds in Turkey (Archer), and *N. sativa*, L., has been cultivated in Europe and the East, the seeds used for seasoning curries (A. Smith), as a pepper substitute in France (Guibort), and for spreading over bread and mixing with cakes by the Egyptians (A. Smith). *Aquilegia Canadensis*, L., var. *formosa*, Fisch., furnishes in its roots an aliment for the Indians of northwest America (R. Brown, Jr.), while *Paeonia albiflora*, Pal., furnishes food in its roots to the Tartars of Mongolia, who eat them after boiling, and also mix the powdered seeds with their tea (Pallas), and the same statement is made for *P. edulis* in Paradisus Londonensis.

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